



# Dances of Yugoslavia

By

LJUBICA & DANICA JANKOVIC

**W**E have but little information concerning Yugoslav dances in past times, but one early record is a fresco in the fourteenth-century monastery of Lesnovo, Macedonia, which depicts a closed circle of dancers, their arms crossed in front, and two musicians. Mediaeval tombstones in Bosnia portray long, solemn rows of dancers; travellers of that period speak of Kolos (chain dances) accompanied by songs. Later both literature and folk poetry mention dances; in the nineteenth century dance-tunes began to be notated, but only in recent times has systematic research been done on our folk dances; this work—begun in Serbia in 1943—is still going on and is revealing unsuspected treasures in Yugoslavia's cultural heritage.

The great variety of folk dances is the result of various factors, the peoples of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia having lived under many different political and social conditions. South and East were mainly exposed to Turkish influences, West and North to those of the Austro-Hungarian Empire,

while Dalmatia and the Adriatic Islands were open to prolonged Italian influence. Despite this our peoples created and cultivated thousands of their own dances with much originality.

## Macedonia

Always a region of conflict, Macedonia remained under Turkish rule until the Balkan War of 1912. Amongst its original elements her choreography contains remnants of Turkish dances, and some oriental influences have been assimilated. Complex rhythms, syncopated steps are characteristic and can be seen in the fascinating Teskoto, the grave Kolo type belonging to Lazaropolje, in various Lisas in the Skoplje region, and in many others.

The Lesnoto, the light Kolo type, comprises hundreds of dances to various tunes, the style varying according to costumes, occupations and economic conditions. For instance, people from formerly backward

regions, who had to leave their homes to seek work elsewhere, use the *pecalbari* style, heavy and expressive of home-sickness, until in the urge to dance they gradually shake it off, working up to a joyful climax; while in contrast the peasant farmers, who know nothing of this nostalgia, pass more quickly into gaiety. The Skoplje region excels in this high-spirited, almost flighty manner of dancing. Around Kicevo the *cifcije*, workers on the one-time feudal estates, have a style recalling past obligatory subservience to Turkish masters. But the clenched fist held behind his back by the Kolo leader was symbolic of the ever-present resistance, and since the expulsion of the Turkish masters the people of Kicevo have held themselves over more and more erect in the dance.

Macedonia, a country where old men are highly skilled dancers, shows a considerable difference in the styles of the two sexes, men dancing with far less restraint than the women. The most general dance form is the open Kolo, the leader of which may perform solo steps.

### Montenegro

Encircled by their high mountains, the Montenegrins, of all our peoples, best preserved their native land from foreign domination. Their chivalrous spirit is reflected in their free, high leaps—as though an unseen lever precipitated them into the air. This free style excels itself in the Couple dance called *Po crnogorski* ('A la Monténegrine') without music of any sort, and in *Skoke*, during which onlookers urge them in song to, hold out as long as possible. Their *Koles* too, demonstrate their brave spirit. In these the sexes are divided, the women dancing with restraint, repeating what the men have just sung. *Crnmicko Kolo* is lively, the dancers crossing their arms behind their backs; in *Tanac* dancers weave in and out. All are sung or danced to the thudding of the feet only. Instrumental music is not used in Montenegrin dancing.

The Kolo of the Boka Kotorska merchant navy is a solemn dance opening the St. Trifun festivities in Kotor.

### Bosnia and Hercegovina

These peoples, who have lived first under Turkish and then under Austrian rule, often

danced without any musical accompaniment whatever, and this characteristic continues today. Such 'music-less' dancing, dependent on rhythm alone, can nevertheless rise to the heights of ecstasy. Wonderful it is to witness and wonderful to hear, the thud of twenty or thirty pairs of feet in precise unison working upon the senses as much as, or probably more than, the most exciting tune.

Other Kolos, such as the *Trusa*, may be performed in this remarkable way or to music. Round Ljubuski the 'Darling Kolo', *Dilber*, is a favourite, while a Couple dance, *Lindjo*, found near Neum Klek, is very temperamental in style. Indeed these sons of rough and mountainous Hercegovina, accustomed to big strides as they step from one rock to another, are apt to become highly exhilarated after a quiet beginning to the dance. In Bosnia the Kolo of Sarajevo is widespread, while the Old Bosnian Kolo has several variants.

### Croatia

This province was under the rule of Austria-Hungary until 1918. It is here, in the environs of the town of Zagreb, that we come across the curious shivering or vibration of the whole body, as though some giant hand were shaking the dancers. This strange characteristic has given rise to such dance names as 'The Shaking and The Old Sieve,' while on the coast and Adriatic islands ancient ceremonial dances have been preserved: for instance, in Istria the *Balun*, on the island of Krk the *Tanac*, on Korcula *Sword dances*, the *Kumpanija* (the Company) and the famous *Moresca*, which is a dance-drama depicting a struggle between Moors and Turks—a local deviation from the usual Christian-versus-Moor tradition—over a Moslem girl.

In Slavonia we note that dance verses, sometimes improvised, are sung and that style and dance technique seem to express the care-free disposition of these people and their ardent temperament.

### Slovenia

This country, long under Austrian domination, shows as a natural result a strong liking for the Pair dance. Some Kolos are combined with Couple dancing, but the latter is the most frequent. We find the Polka for instance, particularly at weddings, while in the Bela

(White) Krajina region there are open, snake-like Kolos, closed Kolos and interesting dances of ritual origin. Research work and restoration of Slovene dances are in progress.

### Serbia

Serbia freed her central regions from Turkish rule in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in these regions the Chain dance predominates together with the straightline dance, dancers tightly grasping their neighbours' belts on either side, their arms crossed. The Sestorka is a humorous dance; the Vlahinja type is widely spread, its name derived from the Turkish way of denoting the Serbs—Vlachs. Formerly this was the dance performed by brides as they bade farewell to their old homes. Before her wedding a girl had to lead the Kolo three times round the house, bowing each time she passed the door. Curious Turks used to gather to watch this traditional farewell of the Vlahinja, the Serbian maiden, and the name passed from the girl to the dance itself.

Serbia is rich in types and steps. Every region has its own dance style; in the Morava valley it is easy and light, in the Kolubara region soft, in the Vlasina area vigorous, but everywhere the style is gay and high-spirited. In Kosovo, which remained under the Turks till 1912, the towns had assimilated oriental characteristics, while the villages retained more of their native temperament. In Prizren, Kolos and the curious and unusual Kalac have retained the charm of the dignified Serbian style of that town; while in the northern part, Vojvodina, freed from Austro-Hungarian rule in 1918, Couple dances are not infrequent. A dance in groups of three, each young man having a girl on either side, is one of the most intricate Vojvodina dances.

### Dances of Ritual Origin

Besides the ceremonial Moresca and Sword dances, already mentioned, we find in some dances survivals of magic dating from before our era. These are now rapidly disappearing.

Of old the end of harvesting in the Backa was celebrated by a procession, the leader of the harvesters wearing a crown made of ears of corn, and by a Kolo during which the dancers poured water on each other—to ensure rain for the next sowing. The Dodole, amongst our most interesting survivals, again invoking

rain and consequent fertility, were formerly performed when there was a drought. A group of young girls would go dancing from house to house, singing as they went songs which contained elements of prayers for rain. One of them, the Dodolo herself, naked beneath leaves, flowers and green grass—a feminine Jack-in-the-Green—performed alone. The householder would come running out with jars and souse her with water, which imitative magic would assuredly bring rain.

The Lazarice, Spring dances combined with song, performed by women on St. Lazarus' Day, eight days before Easter, have lately been taken over by Gypsy women who dance for money, while the Karaljice (Queens) appear on St. George's Day or at Whitsuntide. Their tall, mitre-like head-dresses, often adorned with a sacred picture, make a wonderful show; they carried swords but later handkerchiefs and fluttering bannerets of red silk or roughly woven cloth, described with apples, bells and magic plants. Their aim, like that of the Lazarice, is to 'bring in' health and happiness.

Kolos also may sometimes have a ritual significance as those performed with banners at weddings, which are supposed to protect the newly married couple from evil spirits. There is, for example, the dance called 'Lead the Kolo, Bojana', performed for this purpose; others also to accompany the dressing and shaving of the bridegroom, while others, such as Sareno Kolo, are designed to bring the young couple together and generally end in wedding festivities. Ritual Kolos are done at Whitsuntide and on Easter Monday and round the Midsummer fire.

But our most remarkable ritual dances are perhaps the Rusalia of Macedonia. Men dancers come out between Christmas and the Epiphany with wooden swords attired in ritual dance costume and with ritual gear. Their impressive 'slow-motion' actions and steps are to invoke health and healing and a good harvest next autumn. In their white costumes with little skirts and their measured sword-movements each to himself, spaced so far apart as to almost constitute a solo for each man; not to be confused with the well known European Hilt-and-Point dance—they make a never-to-be-forgotten picture of a present-day dance of one-time magical intent.

Danced at other seasons and in ordinary garb, these dances are not of a ritual nature.

### Music

Our varied populations have produced many sorts of instruments for accompanying our dances. In Serbia we have bagpipes and the *duduk*, a shepherd's flute; in Macedonia the *supeljka*, a primitive flute, and the *zurla* which is a primitive oboe; percussion is represented by the bass drum, called *goc*, in Serbia, and the large drum called *tupan* in Macedonia, Croatia owns bagpipes called *mesnica*, the peasant wind instrument known as *sopela* and many others, but the mandoline like *tamburica* is being used more and more.

Bosnia and Hercegovina share some of these, and have bagpipes of their own.

Certain towns own a whole popular orchestra, *calgije*, but true folk instruments are slowly disappearing and the violin, the accordion and brass are creeping in. Women (more often than men) like to dance to song accompaniments and sometimes without any music at all, accompanied only by the sound of their feet and the jingling of the gold coins with which they are adorned. In the greater part of the country the dancing follows the music, but in Macedonia and Southern Serbia the music follows the dancing.

Dance tunes may be ritual or secular. In the South the ritual tunes are archaic and sung slowly and solemnly. Some tunes are bitonal or even semitonal in compass, producing a peculiar trilling, while others have a wide compass and are in fact elaborate; at the beginning or the end—sometimes in the middle—comes the strange cry or rather sigh, the *ikanje*. This archaic 'Eee—e—e', on no determined note, carries one back to some far distant past, and exciting it is in its stirring of folk memory. We know the usual  $2/4$ ,  $3/4$  and  $4/4$  rhythms but also  $5/4$ , while in Macedonia and Serbia polyrhythmic combinations such as  $4/8+5/8$ ;  $7/8+4/8$ ,  $9/8+11/8$  and others are not at all rare.

Sometimes the length of melodic and dance phrase does not coincide; they overlap each other, synchronising and again diverging, This in practice is very effective and by no means disturbs the dance steps, as the dancers

continue their rhythm during the odd bars until the melody is caught up again.

### Costume

Geographical conditions and the occupations of the wearers are largely responsible for shape, material and even colour in our enormously rich and varied heritage of costume.

In the Macedonian mountains the warm and heavy costumes are in harmony with both the climate and the grave style of dancing. In the agricultural and very warm area near Skoplje the light clothes are in keeping with the airy manner of dancing. The women's dress is either white with black embroidery and a red apron (Skopska Crna Gora) or very colourful (Blatija). Men have a broad red belt, red waist-coat and closely gathered shirt which spreads out when the dancers twist and turn. Macedonia offers an inexhaustible source of decorative costumes and geometrical designs.

Montenegrin men wear blue trousers and a red upper garment with gold embroidery. Pastel colours are characteristic of the women's dress, and the cut of the garments shows off the figure beautifully as the women dance sedately.

In Bosnia and Hercegovina the main feature of the women's dress is a *zubun* (upper part of their costume). Bosnian embroidery is dark or red, mostly in geometric designs; men wear worsteds and jerkins. In Hercegovina the embroidery is multi-coloured, mostly red with floral designs; men don broadcloth and gold embroidery much like the Montenegrins.

The *zubun* is also worn in the Croatian regions near the Bosnian Krajina. The villagers round Zagreb offer a variegated exhibition of women's attire. The vicinity of Sisak boasts finely ornamented women's dresses. Red colour and floral motifs predominate in the Croatian costumes.

In Slovenia the Bela Krajina (White Krajina) is thus called from the white costumes. Girls have white kerchiefs on their heads with stiff uplifted corners so that when they dance white doves with wings stretched out seem to be resting on their heads. The mountaineers wear warm, colourful clothes.

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## DANCES OF YUGOSLAVIA

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In central Serbia, Sumadija, pleated woollen skirts with multi-coloured intersecting stripes and velvet vests embroidered in gold are worn. Men have woollen worsted or broadcloth embellished with silk braid. In the Posavina region we see women wearing vertically striped multi-coloured skirts, open in front and tucked in at the sides of the belt to show the embroidered chemise. In the Vojvodina, the Serbian costume has disappeared, but in Kosovo and

Metohija it still lives, showing elaborate embroidery and small ornaments.

Various kinds of leather moccasins and gaily ornamented stockings complete the picture.

Folk costumes inevitably undergo modifications, and in some localities have now become only museum pieces. But the planned work for the promotion of festivals throughout our country has brought to light the valuable material we possess, not only in folk dance and folk music but in our regional costumes also.